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SUBJECT: SOMALIA - World Food Program Requests Private Security for Food Aid

REF: Nairobi 2380

1. (SBU) SUMMARY. After 1,250 metric tons of food were stolen on September 25, the World Food Program (WFP) Somalia Office has requested that the USG ask the Transitional Federal Government (TFG) to rescind its ban on transporters providing their own armed security personnel. USAID Food for Peace Somalia office supports the WFP's request. The WFP contracts several Somali transportation companies to deliver food throughout Somalia. These shippers say they can no longer guarantee safe passage of food aid. Targeted violence, excessive bribes, and increased insecurity are taking their toll on food aid transporters. While they expect opposition from some TFG leaders, WFP and the transporters maintain that reconstituting their private security forces is the only way to ensure delivery of life-saving resources to 3.5 million vulnerable Somalis. End Summary.

Transporters Key to Aid Delivery

2. (SBU) The September 25 looting of 1,250 metric tons of food aid on a convoy of 35 trucks was by far the worst looting incident to date. The food was stolen in North Mogadishu while Deeqa Construction Company, owned by AmCit Abdulkadir Nur, were transporting it from Mogadishu port to the Bakol Region. Khadija Ali (also an AmCit, and the wife of Abdulkadir Nur) told us that she's never witnessed an incident of this magnitude. In addition to Ali, we recently met separately with Mohamed Mohamud Daylaff, Managing Director of Al-Towfiq Import and Export Company, and Abudulkadir Omar, Managing Director of Swift Traders East Africa, Ltd. Together these companies deliver the bulk of the WFP's USG-funded humanitarian assistance.

3. (SBU) The companies operate in extremely insecure environments. This year five drivers transporting WFP goods have been killed. Recently their convoys have been attacked and hundreds of tons of food have been looted. Traditionally, WFP (and CARE who utilize the same transporters) have ensured the food by requiring transporters to post a bond ranging from 30 to 100 percent of the food's value. Consequently, in the event of theft, the transporters usually re-purchase the looted food or replace it, far cheaper options than forfeiting the bond. However, as the food tonnages have significantly increased this year, the transporters do not have sufficient cash to post the bonds, or buy back looted food.

4. (SBU) The recent 1,250 MT theft highlights the limits of the bond system. Nur indicated that if WFP collects the stolen food's \$800,000 bond, the company will go bankrupt. WFP fears waiving the bond will lead to careless handling of food aid. The WFP and Deeqa

are negotiating payment by installments while Deeqa works to replace some of the food through the local community.

WFP Advocates Armed Security

15. (SBU) Representatives from these and other major transportation contractors requested the WFP seek TFG permission to re-establish private armed security to protect their goods. Otherwise, the transporters indicate that they cannot be held liable for any further looting. The WFP Somalia office has requested USG assistance in intervening on behalf of Somali transportation companies to obtain TFG (and Ethiopian National Defense Force) permission to stand up private armed security escort for their food deliveries. WFP has also asked other diplomatic missions including France, Japan, Sweden, and Netherlands to also advocate on their behalf.

16. (SBU) Although the TFG and the opposition Alliance for the Re-Liberation of Somalia (ARS) have discussed the establishment of safe humanitarian corridors, there has been no progress on the ground. WFP told us that returning to the previous system of transporter-provided armed security is the only way to address the risk of looting and protect their truck drivers. A WFP logistics officer confirmed that the system can be organized quickly using the transporters' networks that still exist.

17. (SBU) In a recent meeting with Deputy Prime Minister Ahmed Abdisalam Adan (reftel), he told us that he endorsed the establishment of uniformed, regulated, armed private security for

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humanitarian aid deliveries since the TFG was unable to provide this security. Abdisalam told us that private security firms could be based on the successful model of the Bakara market private security force established earlier this year. He also noted that private security companies would provide much needed job opportunities for young people who might otherwise be recruited by militias or worse, al-Shabaab. While Abdisalam endorsed the idea, he conceded that not all TFG leaders would look favorably at this initiative.

Sophisticated Security Network

18. (SBU) WFP explained that the transporters would build upon their experience in mounting security arrangements prior to 2006. Until the defeat of the Islamic Courts Union (ICU) and the ENDF presence in Somalia, WFP transporters used to protect convoys of food aid with their own security personnel. The system was a sophisticated network of clan-based personnel from each of the locations the convoy would pass. Through this system, the convoy had sufficient security to deter an attack or looting and sufficient clan representation to negotiate access, without resorting to fighting. At present, each transporter must negotiate separate arrangements with local communities, district commissioners, and other entities that control the roads they travel, each exacting different, but predictable payments for security.

19. (SBU) Ali provided us with a concept paper from her NGO SAACID that describes a grassroots district-based approach to community-level policing and civil justice that we sent by email to the Department. When we asked the transportation companies for details on their vision for how the private security would operate, they asked for time to consult with one another to present a coordinated approach. Transporters conceded that an efficient private security force could quickly surpass the TFG's own security forces, but said that they would not directly challenge the government's forces. Each of the transporters (who are all Hawiye) conceded that they believed President Yusuf would not allow them to be armed, fearing for his own political survival.

Who Is Looting?

¶10. (SBU) Ali told us she blames the ICU for the September theft. Despite appealing to ARS Chairman Sheikh Sharif and Sheikh Dahir Aweys, neither was able to stop the theft while it was happening. Ali said that her husband spoke directly to al-Shabaab leader Mukhtar Robow who denied responsibility and also squarely blamed ICU militias. Nonetheless, according to transporters, all sides of the armed conflict have stolen food: TFG militias, clan-based militias associated with the Islamic Courts Union (ICU), and al-Shabaab. However, each group had its own signature -- the TFG sets up roadblocks to attack, the ICU loots and destroys property indiscriminately, and al-Shabaab uses kidnapping as its preferred tactic to extract payments, Daylaff said.

Companies Profitable and Diversified

¶11. (SBU) The transportation companies are owned by influential business leaders who increasingly reside elsewhere in the region for security's sake. They travel back to Somalia only when absolutely necessary. Thus far, they have been able to effectively manage risk and turn profits in one of the most difficult operating environments in the world. In addition to guaranteed contracts by international NGOs, they also provide private land and sea transportation of goods, construction, and many have associated NGOs. For example, partially funded by the USG through WFP, Khadija Ali's NGO SAACID is implementing the highly successful wet feeding program that is delivering an average of 80,000 hot meals per day through 16 feeding centers in Mogadishu. Still providing diverse services, the business leaders told us that the current security environment is the worst that Somalia has ever seen and that the costs of business have almost become insurmountable.

Mogadishu Mayor Still Collecting Taxes

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¶12. (SBU) Although Mohamed Dheere was removed from his position as Mogadishu Mayor and Benadir governor in August, he still collects excessive "taxes" to exit the port -- as much as \$30,000 per food shipment -- money that never reaches the Treasury, according to Daylaff. Daylaff told us the acting Benadir governor, in office pending overdue regional elections, is Dheere's cousin and continues to operate Dheere's "customs" regime. At each of the checkpoints Daylaff's trucks pass, they are required to pay additional bribes out-of-pocket, since WFP pays a set price for each delivery. However, we understand the rate structures account for these costs and transporters are not losing money on "standard" deliveries.

Comment

¶13. The risk-averse and steadfastly neutral WFP is endorsing armed security escorts as the only option to deliver much needed emergency humanitarian aid. Post agrees and is encouraging representatives within the TFG to consider armed protection for humanitarian convoys. We are also encouraging the transporters to develop a proposal that will be acceptable to all parties. Embassy believes it would be useful to approach the Government of Ethiopia on this subject as well. Meanwhile, the shippers detail a grim picture of the Somali transport sector. Without TFG security, food aid deliveries may soon be too risky and expensive to undertake, they say. Although they have not yet proposed details for how they would re-establish a private security force, it would likely be accomplished with the same creativity, efficiency, and entrepreneurial approach that drive their current operations. While the transporters indicated they would hire across clan lines, this security force would likely be regarded as a threat by President Yusuf and others within the TFG.

RANNEBERGER